

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1264)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
7601 Imperial Highway
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-M
HABS CA-2800-M

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL (Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1264) Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-M

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway. Bonita Hall (LACO No. 1264) is located in the block bounded by Juniper and Bonita Streets, and is sited west of the General Ward Buildings.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754148 N; 392405.8 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: Bonita Hall is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Demonstrating the need for dedicated leisure and relaxation spaces at Rancho Los Amigos, Bonita Hall provided its patients and staff with a venue for live entertainment, games, and social events, reflecting the function of the property as a long-term patient care facility by the early 1930s. Designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival Style, the single story building featured a large room for male patients to gather, as well as several rooms which housed utilities, employment offices and the patients' canteen.¹ Bonita Hall embodied the philosophy of care at Rancho Los Amigos under Superintendent William Ruddy Harriman (1915-1931; 1933-1952), which prioritized the comfort and independence of its patients. Patients could purchase food in the canteen area and enjoy games and live music in the building's recreation hall. An area located to the south of the building provided open space to pitch horseshoes and play croquet.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1932²
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with Bonita Hall.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

¹ Harriman, William R. "1932–1933 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

² According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 2)

4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with Bonita Hall.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for Bonita Hall.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations as they appear from historic photographs include the sealing-up of window and door openings; the replacement of wood doors with metal doors; and the replacement of original window screens with wood-framed double-hung windows.

B. Historic Context:

Bonita Hall

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.³

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to

³ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 3)

the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

In June 1915, William Ruddy Harriman was appointed the new superintendent at the County Poor Farm in order to reestablish the facility after devastating floods and a hog cholera epidemic in 1914 damaged the property's agricultural enterprises. Harriman promptly moved his family into the new Craftsman residence that had been constructed by the prior County Poor Farm superintendent, Charles C. Manning, at the center of the property. When Harriman took over management responsibilities at the County Poor Farm, the institution was providing care to 500 indigent men and women with a staff of 45. Under Harriman's leadership (1915-1931; 1933-1952), the County Poor Farm's agricultural fields and livestock rebounded and an ambitious plan of improvements, including new and expanded wards, was immediately begun to address the rapidly expanding need for patient accommodations and services. Harriman dramatically improved the property, installing an irrigation system, upgrading the utilities, constructing new buildings, organizing administration duties and developing the property's park-like landscape. These improvements were largely accomplished in the wake of the financial surge following World War I.⁴

The range of improvements Harriman initiated at the County Poor Farm reflects the rapid growth of the facility during the 1920s. New and expanded services included the construction of new on-site housing that was provided for the employees responsible for around-the-clock patient care and attention, patient wards, additions to men and women's psychopathic buildings, dining room extensions, nurses' dormitories, employee bungalows, a new power plant, and street improvements.

In addition to the physical changes that were implemented under Harriman's leadership, there were also philosophical changes at the County Poor Farm. Harriman subscribed to the idea that the physical condition of an individual could be improved through occupational therapy activities and uplifting surroundings. Harriman's philosophy for self-improvement soon encompassed every activity at the County Poor Farm. He insisted that the patient's needs and comfort be addressed through the development of amenities at the County Poor Farm. Patients were assigned to work on the farm or in the greenhouse, based on their physical capabilities and individual talents. These occupational therapy activities were also intended as physical therapy, by providing the patients with fresh air, sunshine and independence.⁵

⁴ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁵ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 4)

Throughout the 1920s, as residency continued to increase, Harriman expanded and improved the County Poor Farm's facilities, including a number of large building projects. Understanding the need to house additional patients, Harriman began the construction of four patient wards in 1922 followed by an additional four wards soon after. This project signaled the full-fledged transition of the farm from a rehabilitative care facility for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients. By 1922, the institution had a staff of approximately 175 employees to care for the needs of the 1,500 ambulatory patients living at the South Campus.⁶ By late 1925, an additional five infirmary wards had been constructed. Several substantial buildings continued to be erected through the 1920s. In 1928, the old brick refectory building was razed and replaced with an 850-seat Spanish Colonial Revival Auditorium which provided much needed diversions to the ailing patients and staff. Movies were screened weekly in the Auditorium and other musical types of entertainment were offered as well.

By the end of the 1920s, the County Poor Farm comprised an impressive 540 acres of farmland and buildings, with a property value of \$2 million dollars. Real estate improvements included 3 annual crop yields, one mile of paved roads, an additional one and one-fourth miles of decomposing granite roads, miles of sewer mains connected to the County sanitation system, hundreds of acres of new lawns, gardens, trees, and numerous buildings serving a variety of purposes.^{7,8}

During the 1930s, funding opportunities were significantly reduced as a result of the Depression, slowing ongoing expansion efforts. Despite the shortage of funds during the Depression years, the County Poor Farm managed to maintain all of its existing services and features, including its landscaping department, thanks to the supply of labor provided by the increasing number of admitted inmates. Improvements during this period primarily consisted of maintenance to existing buildings; nonetheless, several significant buildings were erected. A new ward for women patients, Casa Consuelo (1930) with Spanish Colonial Revival styling accommodated 188 female patients in bright and cheery rooms, all with an exterior view. Funds for the construction of a recreational facility for patients, Bonita Hall, were allocated prior to the 1929 stock market crash and Bonita Hall (1932) was one of the few new buildings constructed during the Depression era at Rancho Los Amigos. One change that required no funding occurred in 1932; the County changed the official name from County Poor Farm to "Rancho Los Amigos," which means the Friend's Ranch or Ranch of the Friends. This name change served as public notice of the evolving medical mission of the facility, as well as helping to shed the stigma associated with the title of "Poor Farm."

By late 1937, Rancho Los Amigos was treating close to 3,000 patients annually. The average patient age had been dramatically reduced due to the 1933 enactment of the National Social

⁶ Foster, Henry. 5 October 1959. "History of the Rancho." Los Angeles: University of Southern California Archives. Box 25, Folder 57.

⁷ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

⁸ Harriman, William R. "1927–1928 Annual Report for Rancho Los Amigos." Los Angeles: University of Southern California. Box 22, Folder 13.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 5)

Security Act, which gave individuals over the age of 65 a \$35 monthly allowance. This enabled older inmates to leave institutional care and provide for themselves. Their departure freed space for chronically ill children to be admitted to the new medical center.⁹ This shift in types of patients propelled Rancho Los Amigos into becoming an exclusively hospital facility. The majority of patients could no longer contribute to the production of the farm, which increased the cost of patient care and caused the gradual phasing out of the farming operations.¹⁰

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** Bonita Hall, designed in a minimal interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, is one story in height with a rectangular plan and an asymmetrical east-facing façade. The building has retained many of its character-defining features, which reflect the influence of the Spanish Colonial Revival style: horizontal massing; rectangular plan; prominent picture window defined by segmental arched opening; low-pitched front-gabled roof with moderately overhanging eaves and exposed rafters; and attached south elevation gallery.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of Bonita Hall is deteriorated. The building's doors and windows are boarded over.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The net interior condition space of Bonita Hall, interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces, calculates to 4,875 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage of 5,508 square feet and a footprint of 5,508 square feet.¹¹
2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete foundation.
3. **Walls:** The exterior walls are constructed of brick covered in stucco on the north and south wing additions and on the east façade; all other elevations are painted brick.

⁹ "County Moving Sick Children." 4 October 1937. *Los Angeles Times*, p. A18.

¹⁰ Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

¹¹ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217–056, No. 21, Update to the List of Buildings, Structures, and Features of the Rancho Los Amigos Historic District. Pasadena, CA.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 6)

4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for Bonita Hall consists of a low pitched front gabled roof, constructed of rolled asphalt and gravel, which is supported by brick exterior walls. During the 1970s, Bonita Hall was retrofitted and a plywood diaphragm roof, as well as concrete pilasters and a 4-inch-thick layer of shotcrete, were added.

5. **Openings:**

- a. **Windows:** Fenestrations on all elevations consist of a variety of windows. Windows are located below the eaves on the south elevation. All other windows consist of wood sash casement windows. A large window with a segmented arch which has been divided into several lights is located on the eastern façade.
- b. **Doors:** Entrances to the building are located along the south and north elevations and generally consist of doors with half glazing.

6. **Roof:**

The building is surmounted by a low pitched front gabled roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafters. Shed roofs were added to the west, north, and south elevations. A portal is located between the main building and the south shed addition. Rolled asphalt and gravel cover the roof. Vents composed of horizontal louvers with iron bars over them are located beneath the gables on the west and east elevations.

- C. **Description of Interior:** The interior of Bonita Hall consists of a main entry located on the western end of the south elevation and a small hallway leads in to a large room. All four walls are lined with rooms; a bathroom is located on the northeast corner of the building.

D. **Site:**

1. **General setting:** Existing landscaping surrounding the building consists of a lawn across the street from the north elevation and ivy along the west elevation. Most of the area surrounding the building is paved with concrete and asphalt.
2. **Orientation:** The east-facing Bonita Hall (LACO No. 1264) is located in the block bounded by Juniper and Bonita Streets, and is sited west of the General Ward Buildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for Bonita Hall were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 8)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 9)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 10)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 11)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 12)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, BONITA HALL
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1264)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-M (Page 13)

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for Bonita Hall was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator; and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator; Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator; and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents and provided research, writing, and project oversight.